



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

PAINTERS AND CRITICS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: DIDEROT

BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM M. SLOANE

PART I

THE whole doctrine of evolution was contained in a phrase coined sixty years before Darwin: organs create wants and wants create organs. Yet so sterile was the pseudo-science of nature at that moment that the seed fell on stony ground and did not even germinate. Equally sterile was the soil in which the roots of religion and morality thrive. The eighteenth century was religiously skeptical and morally indifferent: neither literature nor philosophy could keep the high level of achievement attained in the age just passed. Patriotism in the sense of passion for nation and country was negative and out of fashion. There was an arid cosmopolitanism and a desiccated, rationalistic philanthropy. It seemed as if the superb gains of the seventeenth century were to be dissipated, as if the fertilizing flood of thought and action were to be diverted into a thousand rills irrigating a thirsty desert to produce crops of mere sensuous pleasantness.

Yet there was one phenomenon which history finds it very difficult to explain, the spread of art renaissance throughout France and England; the passing of the sceptre from Italy to the West, and the inauguration of the process which in great measure made the nineteenth century look for light and leading to Paris, and in a less degree to the English and Scotch masters of painting. After the campaigns of Charles VIII and Louis XII France swarmed with Italian artists and swam in Italian influence. Something of its own was retained in architecture, but it was not until Henry II that French feeling asserted itself. Wrecked by the frightful civil wars—and a period of spiritual recuperation after the pompous campaigns of Louis XIV—the French temper asserted itself in Le Nôtre, Poussin, Claude, Mignard and Puget; but art, like all else, was centered in the absolute monarch and found no sympathy or patronage in the burgher public. Rococo architecture demanded rococo thought, or rather was the expression of it, as likewise were the painting and sculpture of Louis XV's reign. A sort of wilfulness, of clever meanderings and surprises of line, of tenderness and prettiness in color is everywhere. When we think of Watteau, Fragonard and the rather degenerate Boucher, of the gay sculpture from the hands of Pajou and Clodion, we have a sort of boudoir, teagown, beribboned sensation, a suspicion of sensuous femininity rather than a certitude of virile genius, of the manly quality which first appears in Houdon. But the painting of Greuze, St. Aubin and their kind marks the transition into the homely and natural. This movement, obscured for a time by the shadowy yet exquisite classicism of the Empire, led to emancipation of French genius.

Until the century was far on its way the situation in England was much the same as regards foreign activity and influence. As in painting Holbien was the master-mind of the sixteenth century, and Van Dyck of the seventeenth, so Lely and Kneller were the great figures of the early eighteenth. Foreign feeling characterized archi-

tecture as well as painting. Sculpture there was little or none. It was almost a lightning-burst when Hogarth flashed on the scene with his coarse, satirical and scathing pictures of British morality in high life and low. Reynolds, Gainsborough, Raeburn, Romney, Hoppner and Lawrence revealed the true Britain to itself in a type of work essentially British and the liberation from the fetters of Continental thought or manner was complete. Later the two great carriers of western civilization began to interchange relations once again, and the reactions of French and British art upon each other have been and remain a subject of the keenest interest. In any accurate sense of the word there was no Renaissance in England. There was no new birth because she had never been romanized. There was a conception, a pregnancy and a delivery under the auspices and care of Germans and Dutch; but the child was related very distantly, if at all, to the parentage of French art, in any of its departments.

To gather and state facts in chronological order is important, but it is not history. Annals have value as sources, but for the most part they are meaningless except to the scholar. In the case of both France and England no adequate explanation of sequences or sources has yet been given. If there be one, it must be sought in the soul of the respective peoples, not in their governments, nor in the patronage of the educated social magnates of whom there was an abundant supply, but in a state of society, all embracing; in a learning which was not highly specialized or exclusive; in a political system, without constitutions, nationality or democracy—society, learning and politics each and all saturated with the spirit of the middle class, upper and lower.

It may not be forbidden therefore to offer a few observations on the interplay of social forces during the seventeenth century, an intertwining which to-day would probably be regarded as confused and entangled. In some departments of living this interplay proved nugatory and destructive, but in the matter of art the indeterminate environment and general training resulted in a product which was essentially fine and spiritual, as far as the national sense had secured cohesion and consistency. England and France must be regarded separately, and for certain reasons France must take precedence. Its experience affords both striking contrasts and unexpected parallels with that of England, and aids us in the analysis of British beginnings and advances, all of which are rather obscure.

The seventeenth century in France was, in philosophy, the age of Descartes, Pascal and Malebranche, in literature the age of Bossuet and Corneille: the nineteenth was that of Châteaubriand, of Lamartine and of Hugo: the intermediate century was in comparison flat and colorless, in spite of Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau. This is the deliberate judgment of the few greatest among the critics of our day; and even, by implication, of

writers like John Morley and Matthew Arnold. This feeling is due apparently to the yearning of our epoch for something to replace what the mighty iconoclasts who preceded us believed themselves to have destroyed. There is a type of infidelity—like that of Pierre Bayle whose dictionary was the reference-book of the century—which rests apparently serene and content in pure negation. But its self-sufficiency does not endure. Voltaire was at least a deist and the revolutionary movement begot a dry theism which resulted in a dusty cult. Incredible as it may appear, this broad thinking became so comprehensive in philosophy and science that both reached an ebb low enough to confuse all distinction. Knowing much about everything—with a haughty facility, resulted in knowing much about nothing—with the same cocksureness of self-sufficiency. When the writers of the time announce a scientific spirit, it turns out to be metaphysical, as likewise the philosophic spirit always turns out to be pseudo-scientific.

In consequence there was worse to come. Between what was humane and cosmopolitan on one side, patriotic and national on the other, there was likewise no distinction. From the days of Louis XIV down to 1789 there was no political life in France, and not much elsewhere on the continent. The masses did not participate in politics and of course felt no interest. There was for them no state, no constitution and no nation—nothing but a government in which they had no influence and about which no concern. The one single bond which held together the French, the Germans, the Spanish, even the British, was the respective languages common to each people.

If the century were in no sense patriotic, it was even less Christian. The reason for this is alike clear and obscure, for it is the day of *antinomies*. It is obscure because of confusion: it was an age of *polymaths*, that is, scholars each appropriating the whole field of learning for himself, and also of *polygraphs*, each writing as a poet, a man of letters, a scientific essayist and a philosopher. The seventeenth century had despised the natural and cultivated the mathematical sciences. For Malebranche it was rather a libidinous avocation to pay any attention whatever to what would now be called biology. Curiosity about nature bordered on sin! Metaphysics and theology, mathematics and the fine arts—these alone were the permitted fields of the intellectually elect. Feminism took the form of precision. But travel, adventure, discovery, the opening to enterprise of undeveloped portions of the globe radically transformed this attitude of mind. The study of life and nature gradually supplanted the pure sciences: as the mystical proved to be actual, and the unknown prosaic, so an order or law in the natural world seemed discernible, and the secret of the universe must be, it was vaguely felt, on the verge of revelation! No longer could there be anything supernatural or metaphysical, nothing religious or moral, let alone Christian. Many consider the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to have been the most detestable event in French history, because in Protestantism there was the germ of free thought and free speech. Deprived of this vital element, French life on both sides—the ecclesiastical and the secular—hardened into a fanatical radicalism: between church and so-called science

there could be no reasonable interchange of views and no wholesome compromise.

To illustrate what seems to our age the preposterous confusion of all the departments of intellectual activity, take that between painting and literature. Here are some titles of pictures then in high esteem: "The Clergy, or Religion in Converse with Truth"; "The Third Estate, or Agriculture and Commerce Producing Abundance"; "The Sentiment of Love and Nature for a Time Yielding to Necessity"; "Study Desiring to Arrest the Flight of Time"; "Justice Disarmed by Innocence with the Applause of Wisdom"! Could any themes be more purely literary? and yet the painters of the hour felt no hesitancy in attempting to treat them with the brush. Cautiously considered, such bravado turns out to have some justification; for if painting must, as Whistler contended, be poetry on the one side, so on the other it may be prose, provided the treatment of the theme be personal and independent—the bit of nature viewed athwart a human temperament. What is composition in either the picture or the book except just this? the subject in the mirror of mind, analyzed and ordered by an expert, produced in unity of form by an author-painter or an author-writer?

Such talk however was then as it is now caviare to the many. The plight of the painters was much the same as that of the Grub Street writers: both were hacks, both were without any inspiration except what they drew from foreign traditions and foreigners resident at their doors. Newton, Shaftesbury, Pope and other great Englishmen were the inspiration of French literature, while the Italians were the models in painting and sculpture. The confusion of philosophy, theology, science and literature was quite as complete as that to which we have just alluded. It so remained for an age: but that between letters and fine arts did not. The renaissance of painting as purely French, as expressive of French sentiment, as depicting French life, manners, persons and scenes was due to the work of a literary person, a man permeated by a smattering of all knowledge, the correlation of which made him, in the esteem of everybody except himself, a philosopher; made him apparently anything else than an art critic or connoisseur.

This man was a curious compound of incongruous and unrelated qualities. He was born a lower-middle class burgher and so remained to the end of a long life. Voltaire was the great burgher, aspiring to plutocracy and aristocracy. Rousseau was a pure plebeian, while Diderot, French of the French, with the faults and the virtues of the artisans from whom he sprang, was a plain, homely person who by circumstance was turned from an artisan in cutlery to an artisan publisher's hack.

His father was a capable, kindly man, following the trade of six generations preceding him, and his mother appears to have been an affectionate, busy but somewhat over-enthusiastic matron. The boy came under Jesuit influence as a child, and, exhibiting great liveliness with much versatility, was encouraged to run away, possibly by his teachers, and seek in Paris their higher instruction. But his father caught him on the stairs at midnight, ordered him back to his room and next day accompanied his lad to the capital, placed him in the Collège d'Harcourt, waited wistfully a fortnight for

assurance that his Denis was fit for the work, arranged for a two year's course, and then returned to his apron, his glasses and grinding-wheel. Turned loose in the cruel town at the expiration of that period, young Denis proved to be a reckless, wild and dissipated boy. As he said long after, he caused nothing but pain to his father and sorrow to his mother while they lived. He turned ultra-radical, courted the society of great ladies, and married a shop-girl to whom he was kind but untrue, for he had two mistresses. His keen, ready wit commended him to the rich, his coarse gluttony and rather vulgar manners were overlooked for the contributions of information, criticism and humor which he made to the life of his day. He

was as industrious as any dull clod of a peasant and earned a fairly steady subsistence for his family by writing about anything and everything for which publishers would pay. And he wrote so well that he became the most representative intellect of his time, with a brain gathering and running together into one great sea of erudition; philosophy, science, literature and the fine arts. His atheism, avowed rather than felt, was confused, not definite; he complacently admitted that he was dubbed the philosopher; but his philosophy was partly a loose scheme of material things, concerned little or not at all with the unfolding of origins and plan in the universe, partly a cloudy metaphysic.

William Milligan Sloane

(To be continued)

SLIGHTED MATERIAL

BY ROSALIE M. JONAS

THEY say in the South: to know the Negro you must have been "raised" with him.

This is not true of the unprogressive ex-master and the slowly progressing ex-slave. For, as the freedman seeks to raise himself to the common level of American citizenship, the barrier of race prejudice is built more and more jealously between them. But Nature is a keen humorist, and in that South where conditions are practically unchanged, through the subtle influences of climate or companionship or what not, she has molded her tanned and black children of both races into a kinship closer than most of them realize or some of them would acknowledge.

In this sense, to know the Negro you must have been "raised" with him, lived beside him through the receptive days of childhood, under the same fervid sun, in the same colorful southern atmosphere. One might go even further and say: to know the South you must have been "raised" with the Negro. For while the little white child sits listening dumbly to its countless song-birds, insensitive to the appeal of his garrulous little "brothers" of the field and forest, the little "nigger" at his side mimics the mocking bird, translates for him the language of the coon, the 'possum, the fox, the horse, the cow, the chickens with a sense of simple human fellowship and a sympathetic humor which even La Fontaine and later Rostand, Kipling and our own gentle Joel Chandler Harris give us but artificially by comparison. For none of these have gone—perhaps none of our "superior" race can ever go—as simply, as directly, so with "the heart of a little child" to Nature. And of all the aliens grafted on the South from France, Spain and Ireland, everywhere, the Negro is the one exotic whose roots, so fiercely wrenched from their native soil, have taken firmest hold.

Enslaved by man, the Southern land adopted him with tenderness and warmth. And he grew so close to her that he became her spokesman, her interpreter. And those of us on whom she looked more coldly, for our sins, have had to get our inspiration through her "colored" medium, to whom we turned instinctively—but in our own crass ignorance, despised. We only saw his "funny" side

—God help us! Or at most patted him on the head and told sentimental tales of his affection and fidelity and our tolerant appreciation of these qualities, that were well within the limits of our own narrow prejudices. With smut upon our vacant faces, vulgar horse-play and tuneless "coon-songs" we have made pretense to represent the Minstrel of the South—the only real Minstrel this noise-deafened country has ever known! And because we had neither humanity enough to give him fair play for the full development of his native genius, nor culture enough to see him as the most inspiring artistic "material" that ever spendthrift dullards have wasted—Art herself, now, to shame us, is holding out her hand to him and thrusting us aside.

From over-seas and in the words of one of the world's great writers came the intelligent recognition of that exquisite prose-poem "The Souls of Black Folk" by W. E. B. du Bois. . . . "It is the greatest piece of literature—perhaps the only piece of literature published in this generation, in America" was the verdict. And now another well-known genius—a woman this time and herself an inspired Minstrel, coming to us recently from France, saw at once the Negro's artistic value and in politely concealed amazement exclaimed at our blindness: "But all you have to give the world in Art that is new—that is *American*—it is your Nigair!"

One may imagine the howl of pained egotism and derision that would greet such words here. "What! The Nigger artistic!" cries the outraged Southerner. "I don't know what you mean. He's nuthin' but a joke." And so, even with all the treasure George Cable has dug up for us and a few others have sighted, the greater part of the picturesque and dramatic "material" of that "old South" that awaits revival by the new spirit of intellectual democracy lies still unseen around us.

"The Negro poetic?" we can hear some of our brave Free-Versifiers exclaim scornfully "why, he's rhythmical, tuneful—Impossible!" And then, if the devil move them, they will rush off and "do him up" in brutal discords that show artlessly the artless savage in themselves. "The Coon dramatic?"